



IN TOUCH

What are Panic Attacks?

All of us feel on edge and fearful now and then. These feelings may have their roots in job and home pressures, money problems, or stress from too much to do in too little time. We may say we are feeling “panicky;” however, panic attacks are different. These are multiple episodes of acute, unprovoked terror accompanied by at least four of the following physical symptoms that come on suddenly:

- *chest pain or discomfort*
- *racing, pounding, or skipping heartbeat*
- *trembling*
- *sweating*
- *a sense of impending doom*
- *a choking feeling or difficulty in breathing*
- *dizziness*
- *nausea*
- *abdominal pain*
- *hot or cold flashes*
- *numbness in hands or feet*

The person may believe they are having a heart attack or stroke, have a distorted sense of reality, and feel separate from their bodies. Objects may appear brighter or duller and sounds may be louder or softer to them. If the attack happens in a car,

bus, airplane, or train, the person may have an uncontrollable urge to get out or off immediately. The fear is overpowering and during the attack, people may feel as if they are about to die or lose control of their minds.

These panic attacks can happen at any time and often the first attack happens in young adulthood. Attacks may come during a stressful period in the person's life. Some attacks occur while the person is asleep, but they can happen during waking hours while the person is in the middle of a routine activity. Women are twice as likely as men to develop panic attacks. More than three million Americans will experience panic attacks in their lifetime and about 50 percent of these will have an episode of depression at some time in their lives. Although scientists are not sure of the causes of panic disorder, they believe a combination of physical and emotional factors work together to cause them.

Prompt diagnosis and treatment are vital to prevent the attacks from turning into a panic disorder or phobia. It is important to get an accurate diagnosis, including a complete physical examination to rule out physical causes, such as heart or thyroid conditions. A mental health evaluation might follow if no physical causes are found. Treatment may consist of medications and cognitive and behavior therapies. Self-help is also an important part of controlling panic attacks. Support groups are available, and a therapist can assist with a plan of action.

by Lorri Williams, Ed.D., Clinical Therapist



Helping people lead healthier lives

Meditation Restoration

Meditation is a relaxation exercise conducted in a quiet, calm environment in which a person focuses on breathing to limit thoughts and attention. Although meditation has its roots in Asian religious practices, it can be used as a stress management tool, particularly for anxiety, anger and pain.

How to Do It: Sit upright in a comfortable chair. Close your eyes gently. Relax your shoulders and inhale and exhale a few times to clear your mind of thoughts and concerns. Begin mentally repeating a chosen word (a word that ends in “m” is usually best), or simply stay focused by counting your breaths. Meditation has been shown to help reduce blood pressure, heart rate, and respiratory rate. Your EAP professional can help you find experts in relaxation exercises and other stress management techniques.

Better to go Bariatric?

Jumping onto the latest fad diet could put you at risk if you have medical problems that haven't been diagnosed, according to Denise Bruner, M.D., president of the American Society of Bariatric Physicians. Bariatric physicians specialize in weight loss and offer a comprehensive, medically supervised program to treat overweight persons, obesity and associated conditions. This treatment can include appropriate medication management.

“Persons who are truly obese often have other medical problems accompanying their obesity,” says Bruner. “We frequently see type 2 (adult onset) diabetes, high blood pressure, cardiovascular disease, osteoarthritis and other potentially serious medical conditions in our obese patients.” Like planning for an exercise program, seeing a physician before starting a diet program can be a wise move.

Source: www.asbp.org

Develop Your Humor

Develop your own natural sense of humor by considering the following:

- 1) Understand “controlled spontaneity,” the art of giving yourself permission to be humorous on the spur of the moment when appropriate.
- 2) Value vulnerability. Being able to laugh at yourself and let others join in is part of the art. If you are a credible worker, you have little to fear.
- 3) Establish open relationships with peers that permit informal communication. Drop the “always being serious about everything” style and join the group a bit.
- 4) Go for it. Chances are, you think of funny things, but don't let them fly. The best humor can arise on a momentary impulse. When people laugh, you'll feel like a genius.

Coworkers are Customers Too

Treat coworkers as though they are your most important customers and build effective relationships with them. You will manage customer stress better and have more enthusiasm to serve customers of the organization.

Begin with three relationship skills: 1) Avoid trying to get the last word in when arguments begin. 2) Seek to spot conflicts early and resolve them quickly. Don't say, “just forget it” when you know you *won't* forget it. 3) Avoid verbal insults, whether direct or veiled in other remarks, when you are frustrated with coworkers.

Source: adapted from *Customer Service for Dummies*; IDG 1995

When Helping is Hurting

Most people have heard of the term “enabling.” Enabling is defined as preventing another person from experiencing the adverse consequences of their problematic behavior. Enablers are often emotionally close to the person they enable. They are caught in a cycle of behavior that unwittingly helps the person with a problem grow worse. Over time, enablers may experience the deterioration of their own physical or mental health. A desire for help may only come with a crisis.

Enablers break their cycle by getting past the fear of what will happen when they “let go.” Many enablers fear the demise of the person they enable, so maintain their role in an undesirable relationship rather than risk losing it by choosing healthier behaviors. Enabling behavior is often first learned in childhood, when as a child, it was necessary to care for an adult with personal problems.

Answer these questions to see if you need help breaking an enabling cycle: **1)** *Do your feelings about the person that you enable alternate between love and hate?* **2)** *Do you fear that no one would be there for the person if you stopped enabling?* **3)** *Have you failed to keep promises to yourself about stopping enabling behaviors?* **4)** *Do you feel confident in giving counsel or advice to others about their enabling relationship problems without resolving your own?* **5)** *Do you argue with others who point out your enabling behaviors?* “Yes” answers indicate that help or support is desirable. Discover resources by contacting your EAP professional.

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Headache Help

You've tried everything, so what's missing from your migraine headache management plan? Perhaps it's a support group. Susan Barron, Support Group Coordinator of the National Headache Foundation (NHF), says headache sufferers often dismiss the idea of a support group. Support groups offer ideas on relief, truly effective empathy, and medical advice from professionals. If you can't find a group, free guidance to start one is available by calling NHF at 1-888-643-5552.

Managing Commuter Stress

To ensure safer highway travel and avoid your own short fuse, learn the four “S's” of commuter stress management: **1)** *See* other drivers as equals. They are not out to get you. **2)** *Share* the ride to make the time pass more quickly. **3)** *Switch* the focus away from the stress. Listen to music or books on tape that you have been eager to hear. Remember you cannot control traffic or other drivers, but you can control your reactions to both. **4)** *Succeed* by maximizing your use of “free time.” Use your CD/tape player to learn a foreign language, work on self-improvement, focus on your goals, or improve your spirituality. The secret is turning an intolerable commute into an everyday opportunity. Just remember one important rule: *Pay attention to driving. If something is distracting, don't do it.*

If you observe another driver who is pursuing you and seems angry or bent on taking revenge, take steps to protect yourself:

- don't personalize the situation—avoid eye contact
- find a police station, hospital, or other place with people around to help
- don't go home and don't get out of your car until you are in a safe place

Communication Secrets of the Pros

Who are the world's most knowledgeable communicators and relationship builders? Professional counselors of course! Professional counselors (licensed professional counselors, psychologists, social workers, etc.) take more courses and practice more techniques in effective communication than any profession. You can benefit from what they know. Build trust, demonstrate empathy, and have more effective communication with coworkers by using the following communication secrets of the pros:

Technique: The Open-Ended Question

What: Framing a question that requires a person to give more than a one-word answer.

Effect: The coworker feels you are very interested in what they have to say.

How to Do It: Don't say, "Are you nervous about speaking today?" Say, "What is it like to speak before such a large group?"

Technique: The Sandwich

What: Giving someone negative or difficult-to-hear feedback "sandwiched" between two positive statements.

Effect: Coworker hears negative feedback without feeling attacked.

How to Do It: Don't say, "The meeting you arranged had no refreshments. Say, "The meeting was well done, but refreshments would have made it outstanding. Still, I know everyone had a good time."

Technique: The Paraphrase

What: Restating what a person said in order to communicate that the person was heard.

Effect: Coworker experiences a deep sense of satisfaction that he or she was heard.

How to Do It: Don't say, "Yeah, I hear you." Say, *(Repeat the person's complete statement in your own words).*

To Speak with an EAP Professional,
please call

800.765.0770